

# ***FS Direct***

Direct Communication to Foreign Service Employees and Family Members

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## ***What's Inside***

[From FLO Director](#)

[2003 Federal Employees  
Health Benefits Program](#)

[Click Your Way to More  
Resources](#)

[Spouse Employment  
Assistance Program  
\(SNAP\) Update](#)

[Keeping an Eye on Your  
Eligibility Clock :  
Executive Order  
Eligibility](#)

[College Considerations  
for Foreign Service  
Families](#)

[New Book Addresses  
Realities of the Foreign  
Service](#)

[Homeschooling the  
Foreign Service Child](#)

[Transitional Separate  
Maintenance Allowance](#)

[Two Evacuated CLOs  
Working in FLO](#)

## **FS Direct Subscriptions**

Welcome to the November 2002 edition of *FS Direct*. To keep the publication user-friendly and simple, we have listed the articles in the sidebar to the left. Simply click on those items you are interested in reading. To subscribe to *FS Direct*, email [flo@state.gov](mailto:flo@state.gov) or visit the FLO area of the AAFSW web site at <http://www.aafsw.org> and click on FLO newsletters. *FS Direct* is also available on the FLO Internet web site at <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo>

## **From FLO Director Faye Barnes**

The holiday season is here and the social calendar and activities are starting to heat up. This year, we all face uncertainty because of the volatile international situation and the unpredictability of transnational terrorism. Already there are over 400 individuals from our Foreign Service family who are away from their posts on evacuation status and separated from their friends and family. Holidays, without the warm circle of loved ones, surrounded by familiar holiday items and traditions, can be painful. We hope that we can make this holiday season as pleasant as possible for our evacuees.

David Pollack, internationally renowned expert on Third Culture Kids (TCKs), recently spoke to a large group of Department employees about the challenges we face with our children in this uncertain internationally mobile world. Children are particularly vulnerable in transitions and more so in evacuations, leaving behind the comfort zone, their pets, their belongings and all those new friends they just made at school. Dr. Pollack differentiated between unpacking our bags and "unpacking our minds." Those who are out on an evacuation can be in a 6-month holding pattern; they never unpack their minds. Let's remember them this season.

Best wishes to all of you for 2003.

## **2003 Federal Employees Health Benefits Program**

*By Paula S. Jakub, RHU, Vice President, American Foreign Service Protective Association*

It is no secret that health care costs are rising everywhere. The increase in premium for private employer plans for 2003 are:

CalPERS	up 24%
Large Auto Companies	up 13.99%
Texas State Employees	up 16%
Pacific Business Group	up 25%
Midwest Business Group	up 18.7%
Washington Business Group	up 18%

The bad news is that the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) is not immune to these increases. The good news is that the average FEHBP premium increase for 2003 is 11.1%, down from last year's average 13% increase. The Federal Employees Health Benefits Program remains a model for health care delivery systems throughout the country and, indeed, the world. Among the many reasons are:

- Choice of almost 180 health plans
- Competitive benefit packages
- No pre-existing condition limitation
- Eligible retirees and spouses are covered

2003 premiums (biweekly) for selected plans:

<b>HEALTH PLAN</b>	<b>2003 Bi-Weekly Employee Premium</b>			
	<b>Self Only</b>	<b>% Change</b>	<b>Self and Family</b>	<b>% Change</b>
BCBS Standard	\$45.66	+11.0%	\$105.22	+11.0%
FSBP	\$39.26	+4.9%	\$111.19	+5.7%
GEHA High	\$67.17	+2.5%	\$134.44	+12.5%
Mailhandlers Standard	\$28.09	+9.5%	\$60.97	+9.5%
Mailhandlers High	\$64.29	+16.7%	\$116.54	+17.5%

Things to look for in the 2003 FEHB Plans:

- Increased Calendar year deductibles
- Increased or Added Inpatient hospital copays
- Increased Prescription drug copays
- Added some Preventive care benefits

Read **Changes to this Plan** in **Section 2. How we change for 2003** in your 2003 plan brochure.

**Do not rely on premium costs alone to make your health plan decision. Things like extra deductibles and plan allowances for services especially overseas could end up costing you extra money. Customer service and global coverage are of paramount importance for employees and their families serving overseas.**

Open Season runs through December 9, 2002. The effective date of a change in health plan is the first day of your first full pay period in 2003, January 12<sup>th</sup>, not January 1<sup>st</sup> as we had hoped (maybe in 2004).

**This is your Open Season. Make the best of it.**

## **Click Your Way to More FLO Resources**

**FLO Homepage on the Intranet**

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/index.html>

**FLO Homepage on the Internet**

<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo>

### **FAMILY MEMBER EMPLOYMENT**

- **(Updated)** Popular International Job Search and ExPat Web Sites (by country and by profession)  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/rsrscs/pubs/4510.htm>
- **(New Page)** Family Member Employment Statistics (generated from the FLO Family Member Employment Report)  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c7900.htm>

### **SUPPORT SERVICES**

- **(Updated)** Rates for Separate Maintenance Allowance  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/rsrscs/pubs/2049.htm>  
[updated rates as of October 20, 2002](#)
- **(New Paper)** Evacuation Considerations for Families with School Age Children  
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/15609.pdf>

### **EDUCATION AND YOUTH**

- **(New Page)** College Considerations for the Foreign Service Child  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/14301.htm>
- **(Added)** Education Links, including Resources for Homework Helpers and Links to Web Sites for Raising Bilingual Children  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/1994.htm>
- **(Updated)** Links to Special Education Resources / Homeschooling the Special Needs Child  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/9856.htm>

## NATURALIZATION

- **(New)** Take the INS Practice Test in U.S. History and Government Online and link to information about Forms, Fees and Fingerprints.  
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1966.htm>

## SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) UPDATE

There's good news on the SNAP front! Local employment advisors (LEAs), working at SNAP posts around the world, are making significant progress in identifying prospective employers and community contacts for USG spouses. As the numbers indicate below, over 180 spouses have taken advantage of the services offered by the program. If one adds the month of October, twenty-six (26) spouses have accepted job offers on the local economy. November stats are not yet in, but we expect more spouses to have success with the help of SNAP, which is funded through September 30, 2003. Recognizing the benefits of the SNAP program, FLO is now in the process of identifying more posts to expand the effort, with the hopes of continued funding in the next budget cycle.

### **SNAPSHOTS**

(Includes results from June 2002 through September 2002)

**Number of contacts (perspective employers and community contacts): 527**

**Total number of clients: 182**

**Number of one-on-one client sessions: 180**

**Workshops presented: 92**

**Number of introductions made between clients/ prospective employers: 142**

**Number of interviews: 128**

**Number of job offers versus jobs accepted: 28/19**

You can find a description of SNAP on the FLO web at:

Intranet: <http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/employment/SNAP.html> (with LEA emails)

Internet: <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/9888.htm>

**Publicizing SNAP to businesses operating in countries overseas: Read the article in *Global HR Magazine* -**

[http://www.personneltoday.com/pt\\_archive/arch\\_details.asp?ID=14986&Source=6](http://www.personneltoday.com/pt_archive/arch_details.asp?ID=14986&Source=6)

## Keeping an Eye on Your Eligibility Clock : Executive Order Eligibility

Family members looking for government employment in the United States after Embassy/Consulate work experience abroad should be aware of their "eligibility clock" when applying for federal positions. We want to take this opportunity to clarify the differences between the *term of the appointment, period of executive order eligibility (EOE)* and *intermittent-no-work-scheduled (INWS)* status.

## The FMA Term of Appointment

This year marks the four-year anniversary of the Family Member Appointment (FMA). The family member appointment is a Foreign Service limited non-career appointment with a not-to-exceed date of five years from the original appointment date. Only American-citizen EFMs are eligible for family member appointments at overseas posts. The first day of work on an FMA appointment marks the beginning of one's *term of appointment*. When you leave your FMA position, you are placed into *intermittent-no-work-scheduled (INWS) status*. **Example:** You begin working on January 1, 2003. You may retain your FMA appointment for a period of up to five years from that date – until December 31, 2007 – or until you accept a subsequent position with the USG. During the *term of the appointment*, an eligible family member (EFM) can move from one post to another or back to the United States.

## Intermittent-No-Work-Scheduled (INWS) Status

While the family member is in INWS, benefits are “frozen” and can be reinstated once the employee is hired into another FMA position overseas or into a USG position in the U.S. The advantage of INWS status is that an EFM with executive order eligibility can compete for positions advertised as “limited to eligible Department of State employees,” as well as those advertised for “status candidates,” “non-competitive eligibles” and “all sources.”

### ***Executive Order Eligibility***

*It is important to remember that the eligibility clock starts ticking the day the EFM returns to the United States to resume residence.*

### ***Executive Order Eligibility***

If the EFM remains in a qualifying position (FMA or former PIT positions) for the required 52 weeks or in a series of qualifying appointments totaling 52 weeks abroad, the EFM earns *executive order eligibility (EOE)*. When the EFM returns to the U.S., he/she will have a *three-year window* of opportunity in which to apply for those USG positions which are advertised as “status candidates,” “non-competitive eligibles,” and “all sources.”

**Examples:** EFM enters INWS status on January 15, 1999 and remains at post until September 1999. On September 9 he departs post on his spouse's orders and arrives in the United States. This EFM's executive order eligibility is valid until September 9, 2002 (exactly three years after the date he entered the U.S.).

Conversely, the EFM enters INWS status on January 15, 1999 but returns to the United States in advance of his spouse to set up the household and take care of family business. This EFM's executive order eligibility expires January 15, 2002 because he left post and returned to the United States to *resume residence*.

Even though you may not have reached the ending date of your FMA *term of appointment*, your executive order eligibility could have expired, based on the date you returned to the United States. For further information on family member employment and executive order eligibility, check the FLO web sites.

## **College Considerations for Foreign Service Families**

The Family Liaison Office hosted the first Parenting Information Series panel discussion on “College Admissions and the Foreign Service Child.” Over 60 people attended the session, held in Washington, DC. Here are some tips for immediate use by all those high school seniors struggling with the college application essay!

- When writing about the Foreign Service experience, the applicant should be sure to write about how this experience has changed him/her as a person.
- Travelogues of where the student has been are not what the admissions offices claim to be looking for.
- If there have been any unusual circumstances regarding the applicant’s high school career, i.e. evacuations, multiple moves, illness, etc., it is advisable to address these issues either in the essays or in a clarifying statement from the applicant or the guidance counselor.
- Lastly, when sending in the application, be sure that it’s complete – don’t make the Admissions Office look around for additional information (because chances are they won’t!).

“The consensus of all the admissions people with whom I have spoken recently is that colleges and universities really like Foreign Service kids because of the diversity and broadened perspectives they bring to the college campus,” says Becky Grappo, Education and Youth Officer for the Family Liaison Office. A strong essay is part of the equation in the application process; that, combined with good SATs, GPA, extra-curricular activities, makes for a winning candidate!

The session was videotaped, and copies were sent to every overseas post for check out from the CLO library. For more information, contact Becky Grappo at flo@state.gov

## **New AAFSW Book Speaks to the Realities of the Foreign Service**

The Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) have published a new book presenting honest views on living an internationally mobile Foreign Service lifestyle. Edited by Patricia Linderman and Melissa Brayer-Hess, “this book provides reflections and perspectives on the realities of Foreign Service life as experienced by members of the Foreign Service community around the world,” says AAFSW. “The writers share their unvarnished views on a wide variety of topics they care about: maintaining long-distance relationships, raising teens abroad, dealing with depression, coping with evacuations, readjusting to life in the United States, and many others. These are stories from the diplomatic trenches - true experiences from those who have lived the lifestyle and want to share their hard-learned lessons with others.” To order a copy, visit the AAFSW web site at <http://www.aafsw.org>

## **Homeschooling the Foreign Service Child**

There has been an increased interest among Foreign Service families regarding homeschooling around the world, especially since the policy regarding homeschooling is currently being rewritten. Those who have been working on the implementation guidelines over the last several months are conscientiously seeking solutions to the questions raised by the Department of State homeschooling policy. This committee, comprised of representatives from the Office of Allowances, Office of Overseas Schools, the Family Liaison Office, and Legal Affairs, is seeking to make the guidelines as user-friendly as possible within the constraints of the significant legal issues and Department of State policy. It is also understood that there is some confusion at posts overseas over how to interpret the current homeschooling allowance, and therefore the Committee feels a sense of urgency to get clear guidance out to the field.

At the same time, there is another working group within the Department on "Quality of Life" issues for hard-to-fill posts. Within that group, a sub-committee on education issues is looking at how to make the homeschooling policy workable in designated hardship posts. That committee will be presenting their proposals this coming week.

Homeschooling Foreign Service families may communicate any concerns to the Family Liaison Office at [flo@state.gov](mailto:flo@state.gov). We welcome your input and we appreciate your patience as we tackle these difficult but important issues.

## **Transitional Separate Maintenance Allowance (TSMA)**

State 200304, dated October 10, 2002, announced the new Transitional Separate Maintenance Allowance (TSMA). The interim order was effective September 15, 2002 to assist families evacuated from posts in Pakistan whose SEA payments ended on September 14, 2002.

TSMA was initiated to assist employees with additional costs incurred when their family members are required to occupy commercial housing while establishing permanent housing in the U.S. following an evacuation and the conversion of the post to an unaccompanied status.

Commercial quarters include hotels, motels, commercially-leased houses or apartments. Non-commercial housing is considered private quarters such as living with family, friends or others in a location which is not commercially leased or rented. TSMA may be paid initially for up to 60 calendar days with an additional 30 calendar days allowed following approval by head of agency or authorizing official.



Rates are per day / per family (not per person):

	<b>Days 1-30</b>	<b>Days 31-60</b>	<b>Days 61-90</b>
<b>One to two EFMs:</b>	\$100.00	\$70.00	\$50.00
<b>Three or more EFMs:</b>	\$120.00	\$80.00	\$60.00

TSMA will terminate as of the earliest of the following dates:

- 1) date the employee commences travel under transfer orders from the evacuated post;
- 2) date the authorized period for TSMA ends (at 60 days unless agency approves additional 30 days for extenuating circumstances);
- 3) date the complete household Effects (HHE) shipments is delivered to the family (copy of dated shipping receipt forms should be attached to the SF-1190);
- 4) date the family members occupy non-commercial quarters; or
- 5) date the family members occupy permanent quarters.

Employees apply for TSMA using regular SMA application procedures. For further information about TSMA, contact the Family Liaison Office at [FLO@state.gov](mailto:FLO@state.gov)

## **Two Evacuated CLOs Working in FLO**

For those posted to Jakarta and Surabaya, Indonesia and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, life has been anything but normal in the past few months. Three hundred and fifteen employees and family members were evacuated from Jakarta/Surabaya in late October due to threats of terrorism (the posts' second evacuation in the last two years). One hundred and fifty five employees and family members left Abidjan in October due to an unsuccessful coup and continued political and military unrest.

The Family Liaison Office arranged for the Jakarta and Abidjan Community Liaison Office coordinators (evacuees themselves) to work full-time supporting their communities. With uncertainty about plans for a return to post, CLOs provide information, schedule briefings, and organize social and cultural get-togethers to keep their communities in tact. "A lot of time is spent with individuals helping to resolve unique situations," says one CLO. While most evacuated employees are located here in the Washington, DC area, some family members are spread throughout the United States, and some are located in foreign safehavens. To reach everyone, CLOs email (or snail mail) a weekly letter with practical information, notification of events, and shared questions and answers. There's also a large number of phone calls to handle.

Other FLO staff members are also working with evacuees on questions of school placement, allowances, and spouse employment.

Also currently on evacuation status are employees from Bangui, Central African Republic and employees and family members from Amman, Jordan.